

What God's People Should Be Like

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, please turn to Exodus 34 with me. We've been in this book for maybe a year and a half, a little over or so, and we are nearing the end of the book.

It's the second book of the Bible. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy that you can have, and you can use that while you're here. Exodus 34.

Verses 10 to 28. Let me pray now for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before your word. We have gathered in your name to worship you, to honor you, and also to be addressed by you, to be ministered to by you, to be transformed by you.

So as we incline our ears and our hearts to this word, open up the eyes of our hearts that we might understand and believe and obey to your glory.

[1 : 30] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are willing and able, please stand for the reading of God's word from Exodus 34, verses 10 to 28.

And he said, Behold, behold, behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people, I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation.

And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day.

Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst.

You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their ashram. For you shall worship no other God, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God. Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.

[2 : 40] And when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice. And you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods, and make your sons whore after their gods.

You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib.

For in the month Abib, you came out from Egypt. All that open the womb are mine. All your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep, the firstborn of a donkey, you shall redeem with a lamb. Or if you will not redeem it, you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons, you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed. Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest.

In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. You shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel.

[3 : 50] For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders. No one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the feast of the Passover remain until the morning.

The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. And the Lord said to Moses, Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.

So he was there with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated this time. Especially for those of you who are kind of visiting mid-series, you might be confused by all the details here.

I'm going to use the metaphor, the analogy of marriage, because marriage is a covenant to refer to the relationship between God and his people Israel as God himself does in scripture.

[5 : 06] And so that will hopefully get you to understand what's going on here. It's hard to be faithful to the covenant of marriage. According to an article in the Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy, an estimated 50 to 60% of married men and 45 to 55% of married women commit adultery.

Nearly 50% of married couples get divorced. And over 70% of second marriages end in divorce. That means marital infidelity affects nearly half of all couples.

Some of you have been affected by it. But imagine for a moment that you're the party that cheated on your spouse. You betrayed her trust.

You gravely wronged her. You were caught in the act. You regret that you cheated on a loving spouse for some fleeting moments of pleasure.

And you're deeply ashamed and sorry and you sincerely apologize to your wife, but you're still fully expecting to be divorced. Your life is never going to be the same again.

[6 : 20] But imagine that your spouse, instead of leaving you, even while she is grieving your infidelity, she forgives you and gives you a second chance.

How would you feel? You have been shown mercy. You have received grace. Undeserved favor. You'd feel relief.

You'd feel gratitude. And assuming you were sincere in your repentance, you'd want to make sure that it never happens again. Your wife would probably insist that you cut off all contact with your paramour, and that's a no-brainer.

You would agree to that. And there would likely be other guardrails and guidelines for you to commit to to ensure that the adultery never happens again. That's the situation that the Israelites find themselves in in this passage.

As I've said the last two weeks, the Israelites were like a bride who cheats on her husband on the night of their wedding, adulterating the marriage bed while her husband is making preparations for their new life together.

[7 : 28] While the covenant agreement between God and his people Israel, the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant were fresh off the press, the Israelites abandoned Yahweh, their God, and turned to idols by building a golden bull and prostrating themselves before it.

But God nevertheless showed them mercy and why? Because we saw last week in Exodus 34, 1-9 that the Lord is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Look at verse 10 with me. Look at what God says that he will do again for them. Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation.

And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Just look at how gracious God is to assure them of this and see how fully God forgives them and blesses them and does not count their sins against them.

Even though Israel has broken their covenant with him, he says, again, behold, I am making a covenant. I think if I were in God's shoes, I would tell them something like, hey, well, fine, I'll put up with you just one more time.

[8 : 45] But you're going to live in the doghouse from now on. And if there's even the slightest hint of impropriety, then don't let the door hit you on the way out. I think that would be what I would want to say to the Israelites if I were in God's shoes.

But that's not how God responds. He says, in effect, you have been unfaithful to me, but I will enter into a covenant relationship with you still. And I will dwell with you still.

And I will do for you and among you marvelous and awesome things that have never been done in all the earth or in any nation. That's not the doghouse.

That's paradise. That's the promised land. That's nothing less than the new creation. Notice the creation language in verse 10.

I will do marvels such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. That word create in Hebrew is never predicated of anyone except for God. God's the only one throughout the scriptures who creates in this sense.

[9 : 46] Bringing something out of nothing. Bringing something new. That's what God's promising to do for his people. And we're gonna see what that is in more detail later on. But before we get there, God gives the Israelites some guardrails and guidelines to follow.

God tells them that as recipients of mercy and forgiveness, they should maintain their distinct identity as the people of God. They need to be faithful to him, loyal to him, be identifiable as God's special people.

So to this end, God gives them two things to help them along their journey. Two things that will help them to obey God's commandments and keep their covenant with him. And that's one, a fence. And two, a calendar.

I'll explain what I mean by that. The first thing that God gives them is a fence. We see that in verses 11 and 12. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. Notice the contrast between verse 10 and verse 12.

[10 : 53] In verse 10, God says, I am making a covenant with you. And in verse 12, he tells them not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, lest it become a snare for them. In Korean, the word for we, I think I mentioned this some years ago, four or five, maybe even six years ago in a sermon.

None of you remember. In Korean, the word for we is the same word for a fence or an animal pen that keeps your animals in and intruders and predators out.

Because defining and maintaining who we are requires putting a fence around it, drawing boundary lines to define what is not part of us, to distinguish ourselves from who they are, what those things are.

We is defined in contradistinction to they because if everybody is family, then nobody is family. For this reason, God will drive out the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites from the land of Canaan.

And the Israelites are not to make a covenant with them and keep them in the land because if they do, they will be ensnared by them and lose their distinct identity as the people of God. Marriage is once again a good illustration of this principle because it's meant to be an exclusive partnership, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman.

[12 : 19] Whenever you add other people into that equation, whether that's through adultery or polygamy, you have violated the terms of the covenant and it leads to bad consequences, you can see throughout scripture.

Nowadays, many people are talking about open relationships involving multiple partners. Somerville became the first city just north of us, first city in the country to legally recognize polyamorous relationships in 2020.

But people who advocate for such relationships don't understand a basic reality. The intimacy that you experience in marriage is directly proportional to the sacred exclusivity of your relationship. when the relationship is no longer exclusive, your attention is diverted, your affection, your love is divided, and by necessity, your intimacy is diluted.

It's no longer marriage as God designed it, but an inferior counterfeit. And it works the same way in our relationship with God. Israel cannot be in a covenant relationship with God and yet at the same time be in a covenant relationship with another nation and their gods.

[13 : 36] To be faithful to another is to be unfaithful to the Lord because worship is an either-or proposition. Making a covenant with these nations and intermarrying with them will lead them to whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, as it says in verse 15.

That sexual language continues that theme of covenant and even of marriage. Sexual intimacy is meant to be shared in the context of an exclusive marriage covenant, but when you share it with someone to whom you are not lawfully wedded, you are acting like a prostitute who gives his or her body away to anyone who is willing to pay enough money or maybe even for no money at all.

We might not worship a golden bull statue like the Israelites did, but we nonetheless have our own idols. An idol is anything we count on, anything we trust in more than we do in God.

An idol is anything we desire, anything we are devoted to more than God. That thing or person that we look to to satisfy us, to give us meaning and purpose in life, if it's not the true God, then that is an idol.

Money, success, and fame can be an idol. Even good things like sex, family, and health can be an idol if they become more important to us than God himself.

[15 : 08] When we fall into idolatry, it says that God is jealous for us. It says in verse 14, for you shall worship no other God for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God.

This is the one place in all of scripture where it is said that God's name is jealous. It's part of, core of who he is, his identity. Why?

Because God is love and jealousy is an expression of love. Numbers 5.14 uses the word jealousy to describe what comes over a husband when he suspects that his wife has defiled herself sexually with another.

We tend to think that jealousy is bad. It's a bad problematic emotion. We tend to think that way because in common English, we often conflate and use interchangeably the word jealousy and envy.

But if we get technical, they're not actually the same thing. On the one hand, envy is a longing that a person feels for something that belongs to someone else. For example, when we are envious of someone else's wealth, someone else's looks, someone else's relationships, envy is sinful because it's a failure to love your neighbor as yourself.

[16 : 23] But jealousy is the longing and zeal that a person feels when something or someone that rightfully belongs to him or her is threatened. It's a sign of love as opposed to a sign of indifference.

It is right for the husband or the wife to feel jealous when his or her spouse is flirting with someone else because she belongs to him and not to another man.

Likewise, it is right for God to be jealous for us when we worship another God, when we devote ourselves to another idol because God created us for himself.

He has redeemed us for himself and he paid a steep price for it. We belong to him and to no one else and our worship should therefore be exclusively for God.

That's why this God is jealous for us and that's why he gives the Israelites offense. He says in verse 13, you shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their ashram.

[17 : 29] The altars, pillars, and ashram are all things used in the worship of pagan worship and idols by the Canaanites. Ashram is a plural form of asherah and it says in Deuteronomy 16, 21, you shall not plant any tree as an asherah beside the altar of the Lord your God that you shall make.

So asherim, which is the plural, are probably sacred trees of some kind planted by the Canaanites for the purposes of religious worship. That's why God commands them to cut it down, smash the idols, cut down the asherim.

To 21st century modern pluralists, this kind of command might appear downright barbaric, but the reality is if the Lord our God is God and no one else is God, then false religions are idolatrous, deceptive, and dangerous because they pose eternal peril to their adherents.

Undoubtedly, some people object that this is a supremely arrogant position for Christians to hold. When there are millions of faithful adherents of other religions in the world, who are we to say that Jesus is the one way, the truth, and the life?

Isn't that offensive? A pluralist argues that God is like an elephant and that people of various religions, they touch different parts of the elephant.

[18 : 51] We're all like blind men groping about and feeling different parts of the elephant. They say that one blind man touches the trunk, the long trunk, and says, oh no, the elephant is like a snake.

Another blind person touches the tusk, and then says, oh no, not like a snake at all. The elephant is more like a horn or the head of a spear. And another blind man touches the leg and then says, no, the elephant is actually like a mighty big tree trunk.

And the pluralist argues that actually everybody is right because they're all pointing out an aspect of the elephant and says, well, all people who follow various religions in the world are like those blind men.

They only see a part of the picture, so in that sense they are all right and they are all legitimate and they should all be accepted. That's the argument of the pluralist. The problem, the fallacy of that analogy is that in order for that analogy to work, someone has to see the whole elephant.

If the analogy really were true, then we should all be blind, including the pluralist and no one in the world should know that we're looking at different parts of the same elephant.

[20 : 08] But that's not what the pluralist claims. The pluralist claims to be the one person who recognizes and sees the whole elephant. He says, no one should be exclusive in his religious beliefs and recognize that all the religions of the world are true and legitimate because they all see a part of the truth.

In other words, the pluralist is not affirming the validity of every religion. Rather, he is arrogantly assuming that his perspective alone sees the whole picture and therefore is elevating his pluralistic position to the status of exclusive truth.

That's the subversive appeal of pluralism. He feigns humility and openness but is as arrogant as any religious exclusivist.

there is either one God or there are many gods. Jesus is either the son of God or he is not. Jesus either died for our sins and was raised from the dead or he was not.

We are either saved by the gift of God, by God's grace or we are saved by our good works, by doing good deeds. Both of these things cannot be true.

[21 : 23] These religious claims about which Christianity is at odds with every other religion in the world are either true or false. They cannot both be true. As C.S. Lewis writes in his book Mere Christianity, of course, being a Christian does mean thinking that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.

As in arithmetic, there is only one right answer to a sum and all the other answers are wrong. Some people might still object, well, say that they are wrong but still, why can't you be more tolerant and why can't you just let them be?

These are cultural and historical artifacts. Why can't we just share? Why do you have to tear them down? Isn't it enough that you don't worship their idols? Why do you have to destroy the idols from your midst?

Verse 12 tells us why that kind of drastic measure is necessary, lest it become a snare in your midst. If they let these things remain in their homeland, the Israelites will be ensnared and seduced by them into committing spiritual adultery again.

And that would bring guilt and condemnation upon God's people and ultimately eternal damnation to God's people. And if God's people whom, from whom God has appointed the messianic king Jesus would come goes astray, loses the faith, loses their way, then all all of mankind is lost.

[22 : 51] It's like living in the city, a lot of you guys have mousetraps in your house. Where do you put the mousetrap? I mean, where do the mice go? But you put it in a place that's inaccessible to humans, in the crevices and the corners, behind the fridge or other places where people don't go but where the mice can go because you would never put a mousetrap in the middle of a living room lest you step on it while you're walking around.

Why would you want a snare in the middle of your camp? Why would you want an idol which is seductive and ensnaring in your life, in your home?

The same concern for idolatry applies to us as Christians. Romans 12 says, I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Notice the language of living sacrifice and spiritual worship. This is how we worship God today. We don't offer animal sacrifices but we offer a sacrifice, a living sacrifice of our lives, our worship and obedience and in order to be faithful to God and maintain exclusive allegiance to Him, we need a fence or a filter of some kind so that we are not conformed to this world but instead transformed in accordance with the will of God.

[24 : 25] For example, our society idolizes success. If we as a church start idolizing ministry success and we start sacrificing our principles to do what is popular, to please the crowd, then we need to smash that idol of success to pieces.

If you start to idolize a romantic relationship so that you're starting to compromise your convictions and you're sliding across physical and emotional boundaries that you thought you'd never cross before or outside of marriage, then you need to cut off that relationship from your life.

If you start to idolize money and you sense that your hopes and dreams are rising and falling with the stock market, then you sell it all off.

Give it away to the poor. Tear down those idols. Israelites needed to get rid of the altars and the pillars and the ashram lest they be ensnared.

Likewise, we need to get rid of the idols and flee temptation in our lives. It's naive to think that we can surround ourselves with these idols, the altars and the pillars and the ashram of this world and still live faithful Christian lives.

[25 : 42] People who think that way are like the people who always boast that advertising doesn't work on them. Have you guys heard that? I'm sure some of you have said that before.

Yeah. If you think that you are the marketer's favorite demographic, they love you because you buy into their ads without even knowing it. Advertisements are not trying to persuade you rationally to go and buy some product or something immediately.

They're not a call to action. They're planting these little signals. They're triggering, they're tapping into your natural human desires for love and for acceptance, for significance, for pleasure, for comfort, for status, for sex, for health.

And then if they subtly attach those markers to their brand to create a positive association, a positive feeling about their brand that you're not even aware of subconsciously and then later when you go shopping or go to a grocery store or you go someplace, it's just that slight nudge that's necessary to get you to buy their product as opposed to their competitors.

There's a reason why they spend \$70 billion in TV ads every year. They're not dumb. They've done their research. They know that it works. The seductive power of idolatry works the same way.

[27 : 09] You're not going to become an apostate overnight, but gradually your affections will be reoriented and it will make the things of the world look normal and right and the things of God look strange.

When you read articles and books about the rich and the successful all the time, do you not think that over time that the seductive influence of wealth and fame would affect the way you think and feel about those things?

When you spend less than 10 minutes reading the Bible each day but hours each day reading the news or playing some game, what do you think will control your attitude and affections?

What do you think will shape your concerns and priorities? Eternal things or temporal things? When you spend hours of your day on social media comparing yourselves to others and looking at how many likes and retweets your friends have or other people have, do you think that over time you will not come to believe the lie that your life will be significant only if you could have as many friends or as followers as they have or when you get as many likes as they get?

When you get to see skinny, curvy, and scantily clad women everywhere on billboards and web browsers and even while just walking down the street, do you think that over time you will not believe the lie that that's where true pleasure lies or that you will need to look like that in order for you to be loved?

[28 : 53] I'm not saying that you need to go into a monastery. Monasticism might shield us from outside temptations but it will not protect us from the sinful flesh, the evil within us.

We need to be in the world but not of the world but as Christians we do need to be sober minded and discerning. We need fences. We need filters.

There are some shows that Christians should not watch. There are some places that Christians should not go physically or spiritually or virtually I mean, sorry.

There are some lines that Christians should not cross. Most of us here in Cambridge are not at risk of becoming Amish but some of us are at risk of becoming pagan.

In order to maintain our distinct identity as the people of God we do need some protection. Offense but we need more than that because keeping temptations at bay is important but we also need to reorient our hearts.

[29 : 57] To that end God gives the Israelites a calendar. He commands them to rest and to not work on the seventh day and he gives them three feasts to observe throughout the calendar year.

The feast of unleavened bread and the feast of weeks and the feast of gathering. He says in verse 21 six days you shall work but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.

When God was creating the heavens and the earth he rested on the seventh day to set an example and a pattern for humans to follow because he knew that we needed rest. So the Sabbath is a reminder the seventh day of rest is a reminder that we are finite creatures.

That we are not all powerful. That we are not as indispensable to the running of this world as we like to think we are. It's a discipline that cultivates humility and promotes our dependence on God's ultimate provision.

Plowing time and harvest it says specifically in this verse that they should rest during those times. Those are the two busiest times of the agricultural year. You have to get the seeds planted in time before the rains come and you have to get the wheat harvested before the winds blow them down or before they start to sprout or before they start to develop disease and become inedible.

[31 : 13] So these are the most time sensitive times in the life of the farmer and the Bible specifically says in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest because it's a declaration of trust.

The Lord God is the one who gave us rain not Baal whom the Canaanites worshipped as the God of rain. The Lord God is the one who gave us the growth of the harvest. So we observe the weekly rhythm that the Jews observe this weekly rhythm of the calendar to reinforce their faith in God.

During the busiest season at your job during your finals at school do you still come to church? Do you still take time to worship God to rest in Him to trust in Him?

The three feasts serve a similar function of orienting the people of God. The feast of unleavened bread first is mentioned 25 to 26 and then additional instructions are given a little bit additional instructions are given in verse 25 to 26 after first being mentioned 18 to 20.

Let's look at 18 to 20 first for the feast of unleavened bread. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread seven days you shall eat unleavened bread as I commanded you at the time appointed in the month of Abib for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt all that opened the womb are mine all your male livestock the firstborn of cow and sheep the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or if you shall not redeem it you shall break its neck all the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem and none shall appear before me empty handed.

[32 : 45] So the three feasts the feast of unleavened bread feast of weeks feast of ingathering are all mentioned in verse 18 to 24 and then in that same order there's three addenda additional remarks in verse 25 to 26.

So the additional remark related to the feast of unleavened bread is in verse 25. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened or let the sacrifice of the feast of the Passover remain until the morning.

If you're with us earlier in Exodus when we were in 12 and 13 chapters 12 and 13 God offered detailed instructions and a rationale for this feast because on Passover day God struck down all the firstborn males of Egypt both animals and humans but he spared the Israelites because they had killed a sacrifice an unblemished lamb in order to redeem their firstborns.

This was the final disaster that God brought upon Egypt and after this Pharaoh finally let the Israelites leave Egypt and go out of their slavery. The Israelites were to remember that miraculous deliverance at Passover by offering to the Lord a sacrifice of all the firstborn males of livestock and domestic animals.

But obviously they're not supposed to sacrifice their own children the firstborn sons and so they are commanded to redeem the firstborn sons with payment and offering. This is a way of remembering how God spared the Israelites firstborn sons from the destroying angel by redeeming them with the Passover lamb and that's called the feast of the unleavened bread because they eat the Passover lamb with unleavened bread to commemorate how they had to leave Egypt in haste so they didn't have time to let the bread rise.

[34 : 28] This festival of Passover ultimately points to the ransom that God pays to free his people from their slavery to sin and death in Jesus. It says in 1 Corinthians 5, 6 to 8 Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival not with the old leaven the leaven of malice and evil but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth because Jesus is the ultimate unblemished Passover lamb who was sacrificed for our redemption because he died on the cross for our sins in our place so we might be cleansed of our sins and redeemed from our own slavery to sin and death.

We now celebrate this feast not with a literal festival with unleavened bread and eating and sacrificed lamb but by remembering Jesus by celebrating what he has done for us with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The second feast mentioned is the feast of weeks which is the feast of the first fruits the first fruits of wheat harvest in verse 22. And the additional instruction comes in verse 26. The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God.

This feast is called the feast of weeks because after waving the first sheaf of wheat that you've harvested with the sickle to God you were supposed to count seven weeks of commemorating this feast and then after the seven weeks on the 50th day they were to bring more offerings and sacrifices to kind of the climactic celebration of the feast so on the 50th day they would do that and that's why this feast is called in the New Testament Pentecost that comes from the word that means 50 and the offering of first fruits was a pledge of trust similar to the other feasts it's Israel's way of saying to God you brought these first fruits forth and we trust that you will bring the rest of the harvest the first fruit offering is also to be made from the best of the first fruits not the worst it's supposed to be the cream of the crop not the crumbs of the crop you give God the first fruits the best of the first fruits of your time and of your talents and of your treasures or do you give him the leftovers is it clear to those around you that God is your first priority in life when you throw a birthday party for your friend and you cut the birthday cake you give the first slice to the birthday person right it's a way of honoring them and celebrating them and reminding them that this is for you we put this on for you imagine how sad it would be if you give out the cake to everybody and then the birthday boy or girl is sitting in the corner eating the crumbs the whole world is about God it was created for God your life you are alive and breathing today to exist for God to glorify him your life is about him then that means he should get the first fruits of your life of your work the best of what you can offer in your life taking this and talking about how Jesus fulfilled this in Romans 8 23

[38 : 15] Paul tells us that we God's people are the first fruits of the spirit we are God's reward the reward of the harvest that he brings forth the first of it but not the last the full redemption we still await with the glorification of our bodies that is to come in the future the third and final major feast is the feast of in gathering at the year's end mentioned in verse 22 and the additional instruction comes in verse 26 you shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk this feast is more commonly called the feast of tabernacles or the feast of booths because that's how the Israelites lived in the wilderness and this feast came to be associated with the wilderness the tent or the tabernacle where they worship God and also the tent in which they lived it's kind of like their thanksgiving harvest remembering the harvest and giving thanks to God for it and the oddly specific command you shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk was also given earlier in Exodus 23 19

I mentioned this then that following the 12th century AD Jewish philosopher Maimonides many scholars argue that this verse is forbidding the Israelites from following the pagan practices of their ancient Near Eastern labors there is a chance that a ritual similar to what's mentioned here was written about in an ancient Ugaritic text involved boiling a young goat in its mother's milk probably some kind fertility ritual to please the gods ensure a good harvest for the following year since milk is a symbol of life and a goat kid is a symbol of fertility it's also possible that there's just something perverse about boiling a young goat in its own mother's milk because the young goat should be fed and nourished by its mother's milk not cooked and killed in it and so again God is teaching the people of God to orient themselves toward him to remember that he's the one who gives the harvest he's the one who takes care of them not these false gods and idols

Jesus fulfills this as well during the feast of tabernacles in fulfillment of the tabernacle God's people Solomon built the temple of God as he says in 1 Kings 8 65 and now Jesus says and Paul says in following him in 1 Corinthians 3 16 that we God's people are being built up as the tabernacle or the temple of God a spiritual house for him so this is why we don't literally celebrate these feasts as Christians because Christ has fulfilled them all Colossians 2 16 17 says therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath these are a shadow of the things to come but the substance belongs to Christ when you see a shadow as you're walking passing over you you see the shadow on the ground you look up to see the bird flying overhead it's the shadow that points to the substance that is there the reality that is there likewise these feasts and the Sabbaths were meant to be a shadow that points to the reality the substance of Jesus who is to come and fulfill all of these things so now that Christ has come instead of celebrating these feasts we gather on the Lord's Day on Sundays to remember Christ

and his redemptive work and in the Lord's Supper we remember his body broken for us his body which is for us and we remember his blood that was poured out for us for our atonement for our salvation and this weekly rhythm has the similar effect that the festivals had for the Jews of shaping our attitudes how we think and shaping our affections how we love and what we love theologian James K. Smith writes about this in his book you are what you love the spiritual power of habit he says in worship we don't just come to show God our devotion and give him our praise we are called to worship because in this encounter

God remakes and molds us top down worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts reforms our desires and rehabilitates our loves worship isn't just something we do it is where God does something to us worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts credit to Ed for pointing this out to me this passage earlier this week yes we gather to worship God together on Sundays that's our primary purpose but that's not the only purpose of our gathering here as we are singing to God as we hear God's word preached as we encourage and exhort one another with the truths of God we are being transformed by the renewal of our mind our hearts are being recalibrated our minds are being realigned to the things of God to his values to his purposes and priorities that's how we maintain our distinct identity as the people of God but no matter how much you try to retrain your heart if you still have an old sinful heart a heart that has not been made new by the power of the Holy Spirit it's all in vain no amount of training can change you it says in verse 28 that Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights he neither ate bread nor drank water and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant the ten commandments

Moses wrote these words down on tablets of stone to show how permanent they are Moses didn't write them God wrote them he took the tablets to God for him to write but nevertheless Moses had no power to make the Israelites remain faithful to him again and again throughout the book of Numbers Deuteronomy you see how Israelites are unfaithful to God on their journey to the promised land and at the end of Moses' life he knows that the Israelites will continue to be unfaithful but then he tells them of this prophecy he prophesies of a day in Deuteronomy 36 when the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live he's prophesying of a day when the Israelites will have a new heart when the old is peeled away and the new comes forth Moses did not get to see that day because Jesus is the one who fulfilled this promise and prophecy just like Moses who fasted 40 days and 40 nights before bringing the 10 commandments down on tablets of stone

[45 : 03] Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before he began his earthly ministry in Matthew 4 and 2 Corinthians 3 3 tells us that while the commandments of God were written on tablets of stone during Moses' day Jesus writes with the ink of the Holy Spirit on the tablets of human hearts so that we love and obey God with our whole hearts this doesn't mean that we no longer sin or that we obey God perfectly but we now have new desires we don't obey because we have to even when we don't want to that's what the legalists do we don't disobey because we don't want to that's what the lawless people do but we obey God because we want to because we now have a new heart from the inside out we're transformed to love him and obey him and to serve him and that's ultimately what God had promised in verse 10 when he said

I will create something that I've never done before something marvelous and awesome in Jesus God forges a new covenant with his people and in Jesus God brings about the new creation 2 Corinthians 5 17 therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come a fence and a calendar are useful for those who have already been made new but no amount of fencing and calendaring can make you a new creation if you're not yet a follower of Christ no amount of church attendance will save you only Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit can do that so you need to repent of your sins and turn to him in faith and for the rest of us let's keep on focusing our hearts and minds on Jesus it's only when we fix our eyes on him that we can stay the course and maintain our identity our distinct identity as the people of God let's pray together

Father we confess that it's so easy for us to just drift in the currents of this world this sinful world we can so quickly get unmoored from the anchor of Christ so help us Lord as we gather in your name as we remember Christ the Passover lamb who was sacrificed for us as we rest in you remind us of our new identity in Christ and help us to live faithfully to be loyal to be dependent on you so that we

can be your witnesses so that we can maintain our identity as a distinct people of God chosen as your special possession to bring you glory
Lord set us apart for yourself we want to honor you in Jesus name we pray Amen establish unto you about yourá